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HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK COMES OF AGE^{1/}

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The rural woman of the United States is coming into her own in public realization of her efficient leadership of constructive rural home and community endeavors, and in widespread recognition by economists, sociologists, educators, and far-seeing statesmen as a vital factor in national security and progress. Her ally in bringing about this change is the county home demonstration agent, who has been her counselor and friend for nearly a quarter of a century.

Long Ago

Before the advent of the home demonstration agent things were different. And it is true that until good roads, automobiles, labor-saving devices, and educational service came to her aid, the farm woman was often isolated and had long hours of heavy daily toil. Always, however, she has had staunch advocates and understanding friends.

As early as 1897 Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson wrote in his annual report to the Congress, "In the great work of helping the women of our land, nearly half of whom are toiling in the homes upon our farms, this department, it is believed, has a large duty to perform. For whatever will be effective in

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raising the grade of the home life on the farm, in securing the better nourishment of the farmer's family and in surrounding them with the refinements and attractions of a well-ordered home, will powerfully contribute alike to the material prosperity of the country and the general welfare of the farmers."

Theodore Roosevelt called the Nation's attention to the importance of the farm woman by appointing a country-life commission whose hearings, attended by farm men and women from 40 States and Territories, bore testimony to the great need "of relief for farm women from many of her manual burdens on the one hand" and "to interest her in outside activities on the other." Included in President Roosevelt's letter transmitting the report to the Congress are the words:

"Our civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness, and the completeness as well as the prosperity of life in the country. No one can fail to recognize the necessity for building up the life of the farm upon its social as well as upon its productive side. The farmer should realize that the person who most needs consideration on the farm is his wife. I do not mean that she should purchase ease at the expense of duty But if she does her duty she is more entitled to our regard even than the man who does his duty; and the man should show especial consideration for her needs."

Seaman A. Knapp, pioneer in extension work, first publicly expressed his idea of home demonstration work in December 1910, when he said, "It is also realized that the great force that readjusts the world originates in the home. Home conditions will ultimately mold the man's life." He recurrently stressed the importance of the farm home in farming enterprise and in rural progress. On one occasion he said:

"The home is the center of interest and the center of activity on the farm, and no extension of education for the rural people is complete which does not carry a large portion of valuable information for the help of the homemaker and the girl on the farm."

Other forces had been helping to direct thought toward the farm home. Home-economics departments had been established in State agricultural colleges in Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas between 1869 and 1873, and by 1905 eighteen agricultural colleges had such departments.

Beginning in 1871, women attended farmers' institutes. Ere long special institutes for women were held. Extension schools of several days' duration and reading courses on many topics of concern to the rural home soon followed.

The Nation Authorizes Home Demonstration Work

In 1913 the bill now known as the Smith-Lever Act was introduced into the National Congress. In presenting the bill, Congressman Lever said, in part:

"Your committee commends to the especial attention of this House that feature of the bill which provides authority for the itinerant teaching of home economics or home management. This is the first time in the history of the country that the Federal Government has shown any tangible purpose or desire to help the farm woman in a direct way, to solve her manifold problems and lessen her heavy burdens. The drudgery and toil of the farm wife have not been appreciated by those upon whom the duty of legislation devolves, nor has proper weight been given to her influence upon rural life. Our efforts heretofore have been given in aid of the farm man, his horses, cattle and hogs, but his wife and girls have been neglected almost to the point of criminality. This bill provides the authority and the funds for inaugurating a system of teaching the farm wife and farm girl the elementary principles of homemaking and home management, and your committee believes there is no more important work in the country than this."

In October of 1913, the Secretary of Agriculture, David F. Houston, in anticipation of the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, wrote letters to 110,000 farm women, wives of crop reporters throughout the United States, asking what they wished the United States Department of Agriculture to do for them. Fifty-five thousand women replied. From the 1913 annual report of the Secretary of Agriculture is quoted the following:

"The overwork of farm women and their fear of the effect of overwork on their children is the text of many of these letters. The difficulty of securing domestic help, due seemingly to the fact that daughters of farmers no longer take positions as homemakers, has added to the farm housekeeper's burden. Many ask the Department to prove to the men that their work is worth something in dollars and cents. Still others express a realization that their own lot is hopeless, and self-sacrificingly ask that better things in the way of education, cheaper schoolbooks, improved schools, lectures, libraries, and amusements be provided for their children. Many request that the Department establish a woman's bureau, and issue weekly or other publications designed for women and dealing with matters of cooking, clothing, home furnishing, education of children, care of the sick, etc."

On May 8, 1914 President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever bill and it became law, thus opening doors to undreamed of opportunity and satisfaction to the rural womanhood of the land.

The objective of this work as indicated in the text of the bill is, "To aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics, and to encourage application of the same. to persons not attending or resident in said colleges [of agriculture and mechanic arts]."

Prior to the passage of the Smith-Lever bill, some home demonstration agents had been employed in the South to work with girls and in the North to work with farm women. In the main the agents in the South were school teachers, who were given special training in gardening and canning and were employed during the summer months only. They were women of outstanding ability who knew local conditions. The first of these agents was Miss Marie S. Cromer who, in 1910, organized a tomato-canning club of girls in Aiken County, S. C. By 1912 interest and desire for training was shown by many rural women. To quote O. B. Martin, pioneer in this field of education,^{2/} "It was in 1913 that the farm women's part in the home demonstration work began to assume such proportions as to justify the agents in giving it special attention and separate definition."

That home demonstration agents' work in the early years was conducted under difficulties is evinced by the following excerpt from the report of the State home demonstration agent for Arkansas in 1914:

"Special mention should be made of one of the agents, Miss Mame Weaver, of Yell County, who has worked 6 months in the year, 3 days in the week and has made the trips over the county on foot, walking as many as 20 miles a day on many days and at a salary of \$12.50 per month. She has been teaching school during the fall and winter to pay the debts she contracted while being canning-club agent."

In addition to the difficulties of travel it is to be realized that these early home demonstration agents were embarking upon an uncharted highway of educational endeavor. They were pioneering in the field of adult education. The program which they developed and the teaching procedures used by them were evolved under the leadership of an unusual philosopher and educator, Dr. Knapp, who used age-old principles of education in a new way to meet a new teaching situation. It was called "the demonstration method." That this procedure for teaching adults was educationally sound has been proved by the fact that throughout nearly a quarter of a century, in ever-increasing numbers, busy farm women have risen even earlier than usual to conduct their household tasks in order to attend meetings to learn better homemaking practices from the home demonstration agent; not because it was required, not to gain a college diploma, not to obtain a teaching position, but solely because the assistance rendered by the agent brought to the farm woman rich rewards in improved daily family life. Surely this joyousness of learning by busy farm women is an example of vitalized education at its best such as has been the ideal of educational philosophers throughout the ages.

Opportunity Beckons to the Farm Woman

With the passage of the Smith-Lever Act home demonstration work began to expand in the South and to develop slowly in the North where the first agent was appointed in Utah in 1913. In the northern 33 States only 28 agents had been appointed by June 30, 1917, whereas there were 420 home demonstration agents in

^{2/}Martin, O. B. The Demonstration Work. 269 pp. Boston, The Stratford Co., 1921.

the 15 southern States, in the fall of 1916. In all the States organized groups of rural women were formed to receive home demonstration instruction, the women being trained by the home demonstration agents to act as demonstrators of recommended home practices. And throughout the years how the women have treasured these meetings to which they have come on foot, in wagons, on horseback, and later via the "tin Lizzie." Their motto has been "Not an empty seat in a car-load", for in addition to learning to be better homemakers, they have become better acquainted with their neighbors, formed new acquaintances, enlarged their interests, and planned constructive community affairs. In many groups they have practiced simple recreational activities as a means of relaxation during the meetings which later find repetition in their homes or at social affairs of the community.

Changes Come to the Farm Home

Quite logically, in view of the economic situation existing in the South, and the lack of diversified agriculture, instruction in the early years for both women and girls was directed toward food production, especially vegetable gardening, dairy products and poultry, food preservation, and marketing, with standardization of products an outstanding feature. Labor-saving equipment and sanitation in the home also were emphasized.

During the period of the World War, home demonstration agents in all States trained farm women in methods of food production and preservation, and in use of wheat substitutes as woman's contribution to the food supply for the soldiers, and in clothing conservation. When the war was over, the long-time program for home demonstration work was undertaken.

On the whole, the economic pressure in the North had not been as great as in the South, so that in the post-war period the outstanding phases of the program in the North included home health, household sanitation, meal planning and preparation, child feeding, construction of clothing, household equipment, selection, and arrangement, and vegetable gardening.

In the South, following the war, home demonstration work continued on much the same basis as before, with "Live-at-home" as the slogan used to promote good living and sound economy. Hand weaving, basketry, and other handicraft, and use of cotton fabrics and other native products found increasing place in the program in the South.

The decade following the World War found home demonstration programs gradually expanding to include features that made for attractiveness in the home. There were demonstrations of "The livable living room", "Color in the home", "Slip covers, curtains, and draperies", "Braided and hooked rugs", "Furniture selection and renovation", "Picture selection", and "Landscape gardening." Community recreation developed widespread interest, and trips to historic shrines, beauty spots, art galleries, museums, and flower shows, were frequently reported.

As the body of knowledge in child development and parent education became

organized, instruction in this field was added as a natural outgrowth of the earlier instruction and interest in child health and feeding and in clothing for children.

In 1921, the agricultural depression had begun, and by 1932 cash income was negligible among hundreds of thousands of farm families. The problem confronting the farm woman during this period was fourfold, (1) to utilize the resources of the farm, material and human, to the maximum, to conserve cash; (2) to spend available cash with the maximum of efficiency; (3) to add to the cash income where possible; (4) to keep up the morale of the farm family and community and to aid others less fortunate, as circumstances permitted.

The unfailing courage of farm women during this period, and the heroic service given by home demonstration agents to help them to maintain suitable standards of living when literally almost no cash was available, is a story which has never been adequately portrayed.

Troubled minds and tired bodies made for nervous tension, and home demonstration agents helped rural women to recognize the value of home accounts as a guide to effective money management, and of time schedules as a guide to energy conservation. They also provided rural women with information regarding "consumer purchasing", and "business facts for the farm home."

With the aid of the home demonstration agent many practices long since relegated to the factory, were resurrected in the home, and home-made cleaning supplies; home dry cleaning; home laundering of wool and silk; home butchering, sausage making, soup making, even home washing and carding of wool and the use of cotton to make comforts and mattresses were practiced to save cash expenditures and to utilize farm produce which would bring so little cash income if sold on the market.

By 1934, when the Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed, many rural women had already found interest in various phases of economics including cooperative marketing, price trends, tariff, and taxation. At present, with the aid of home demonstration agents, farm women in increasing numbers are studying the basic economic, social, and civic situations, their causes, and their implications as to taxation, production control, tariffs, and international relations, in their effect upon rural life.

Local Leadership

From the beginning, home demonstration agents have helped rural women to become effective officers and demonstrators in local home demonstration clubs. As the agents developed experience in this new field of teaching, and farm women gained self-confidence through more frequent contacts with people and through recognition as successful demonstrators of desirable home practices, rural women, stimulated to do so by the home demonstration agent, took an increasing degree of responsibility in helping to analyze current conditions and to decide as to the program which would most effectively meet the needs of the women concerned.

A unique feature of home demonstration work which has been a fundamental factor in this development of capability among rural women is the system known as "local leadership" which, like many great movements, was devised to solve a specific problem but was soon recognized as a fundamentally sound and valuable principle and was widely adopted.

As home demonstration work developed, it was realized that the number of farm homemakers per county (average number farms per county, 2,200) made impossible the desired recurrent contacts with farm women by the home demonstration agent, even though she met them in organized groups. In Massachusetts the demand for clothing construction work was more than could be met with the available staff. To solve the problem a system of local leadership was developed, the theory and practice of which, as modified and used in extension work today, is recognized by many educators as one of the greatest contributions which have been made in recent years to the field of education.

According to this plan, two rural homemakers, who are chosen by each community group, come to a central point in the county at monthly intervals to receive from the technically trained agent or specialist instruction in simple units of subject matter based upon scientific research. Practical experience is given under the supervision of the home demonstration agent. These women then return home and teach their neighbors what they have learned. This system, which requires superior teaching ability by the home demonstration staff, is amazingly effective both qualitatively and quantitatively, and has served to supplement in marked degree the teaching of the home demonstration agent. Local leadership has been the means of discovering and developing unrealized talents and capacities, and has done much to give to the rural woman self-confidence and satisfaction of service to her community. It has also produced a vast reservoir of informed and conservative rural leadership.

To the credit of the home demonstration staff be it said that in ever-increasing degree they have encouraged farm women to assume responsible leadership in determining upon the home demonstration program to be undertaken and to serve as advisers to the trained home demonstration staff in all matters concerned with the further development and efficiency of home demonstration work.

During 1934 nearly 130,000 rural women received training from home demonstration agents and served as volunteer local leaders in home demonstration work.

The Home Demonstration Agent

The home demonstration agent is not a "fair-weather friend" of the rural family. She aids them when emergency confronts them and also with the problems of normal daily living. She has been on the front line of assistance to relief agencies whenever trouble in such forms as flood, drought, grasshoppers, hurricane, or economic concern has confronted rural people.

Far-seeing vision, unquenchable faith, dauntless courage, and heroically

sustained endeavor in the face of discouragement, have been the outstanding characteristics of these women, who have been the pioneers in this internationally acclaimed field of adult education in homemaking, and from which they have received rich reward in satisfaction from their contacts with the courageous, philosophical, unselfish women on the land.

No tribute is too great to pay to the early leaders of this movement, both men and women, for they gave to it a record of capable leadership, vision, steadfastness of purpose, and standard for public service, which has been a challenge to all who have followed in their footsteps.

An example of the pioneer women in home demonstration work, and one who, while holding fast to the best traditions of the past, is in the foreground in modern thought and practice, is Jane S. McKimmon, State home demonstration agent of North Carolina, who has held that appointment continuously since November 24, 1911. Gracious in manner, keen in intellect, and dynamic in action, she continues her work as a devoted friend of farm women and a creative educator.

In 1914, while still engaged in work with girls, Mrs. McKimmon wrote:

"If we had the funds to employ these agents for the whole year, in my opinion there could be found no more efficient means of organizing the country women for better living."

In her report for 1933 one reads:

"The big factors to be recognized in 1933 in North Carolina were the sharp increase in the number of farm families with which the home demonstration staff worked, and the effective use of the leadership of farm women who for many years have been trained in home demonstration clubs. In 1917 and 1918 North Carolina home demonstration clubs furnished the only piece of rural machinery in the State through which the county, State, and Nation could speak to the farm home, and through which in return organized farm women could respond to their Government's call. In the present emergency the home demonstration organization has again furnished the rural machinery through which the Government may speak to the farm home of its plan for the readjustment of agriculture and for the well-being of the farm family."

When the Smith-Lever Act was passed, the work already begun in the South was continued under the direction of the staff who had already been associated with Dr. Seaman Knapp. Mary E. Creswell of Georgia, was appointed as the first woman field agent in the United States Department of Agriculture to assist in the supervision and guidance of home demonstration work in the South. Miss Creswell had been a successful leader in home demonstration work in Georgia since July 1911, and her appointment to the Federal office was made October 3, 1914.

Because the work in the North had no such precedent of experience, a

separate office and staff was set up to undertake the work in that area. On May 6, 1915, Florence E. Ward was brought into the Federal office as assistant in boy's and girl's club work. On March 12, 1918, she was transferred to a section of the Northern office designated as "Extension Work with Women", and was charged with the direction and development of this work in the Northern and Western States.

The problems and challenge of administering this vast new educational endeavor were tremendous, and the discriminating and capable judgment shown by these two pioneers and the small staff associated with them in the Federal office during the early years served to capitalize upon the varied experiences and judgment of all associated in the work, yet challenged the initiative of each individual engaged in this cooperative endeavor.

In 1922 the Offices, South and North, were combined and a regional plan of administration superseded the administration by women of home demonstration work as a separate unit. Annually nearly a million rural homemakers are members of home demonstration groups, and many others are receiving needed assistance by means of helps received at special meetings, through the press, by circular letters, etc.

A farm woman once described the county home demonstration agent as "Heaven come to earth in a tin Lizzie." The home demonstration agent may not be alpha and omega to farm women, but she is recognized by hundreds of thousands of them as a loyal friend whose unfailing cheer and dependable helpfulness in all fields relating to the rural home are an asset of priceless worth.

The Record of the Years

Home demonstration work has served rural women in many ways. It has helped them to find a stimulating challenge in the job of homemaking. It has aided them to develop standards for the various phases of daily life, from such tangible things as health, food, clothing, and daily tasks, to such intangibles as desirable family relationships, picture appreciation, music, reading, and inexpensive good times in the community. It has provided them with the needed information and skills to bring about desired results. It has helped them to recognize resulting social and economic satisfactions for themselves and for their families.

Home demonstration work has provided for rural women the opportunity to meet together, to express themselves, to work cooperatively, to enjoy recreation, to exchange experiences and judgments, to stimulate their thinking into constructive channels, to challenge their standards, critically to evaluate their own efficiency, to set challenging goals for self-achievement, to recognize the need of cooperation among farm people, and to know the resources which are at hand to aid in bringing about these desired objectives.

Home demonstration work has carried the interest of the farm woman beyond

her home. It has led her to contribute to the physical and social welfare of her community. It has beckoned her to attend farm and Home Week at the State agricultural college. It has lured her into participating in a 3- or 4-day farm women's camp, where she is relieved of all housekeeping responsibilities and enjoys a stimulating educational program which is effectively supplemented by adequate relaxation and such recreational activities as nature study, singing, swimming, handicrafts, and the presentation of simple plays and pageants which are often guided by some talented member of the homemaker group.

Recently home demonstration work has opened still larger vistas before the farm woman, in that it has informed her about national and world conditions and needs, including factors of social, economic, and political importance in their relation to agriculture and rural well-being. Home demonstration work has challenged her, aided her, and lauded her as woman, homemaker, and citizen, and has provided an avenue by which the national and State governments may speak to the farm woman and by which she in turn may speak to them. It has developed partnership between the farm woman and her government.

These results have been accomplished in a gratifying degree, but the greatest factor of achievement through home demonstration work has been the change that it has wrought in rural women. Increased capability, joyous living, altruistic service, and realization of homemaking as a challenging science and art, plainly are evidence that the public is recognizing the rural womanhood of the land as an important national asset.

Home demonstration work is just coming into its legal majority. What its trend will be in the years immediately ahead is uncertain, for that will be determined by the judgment of farm women themselves upon the basis of current needs and future outlook. It is to be hoped, however, that whatever the detail may be, home demonstration work may continue to merit the appreciative loyalty and affection of the farm women of the United States, and that it may help to fulfill the ideal of the farm home as expressed by Dr. Seaman A. Knapp:

"A country home, be it ever so simple, with a father and mother of gentle culture is nature's university and more richly endowed for the training of youth than Yale or Harvard."

The significance of home demonstration work has been interpreted by Dr. Knapp in these words:

"The home eventually controls the viewpoint of a man, and you may do all that you are a mind to in schools, but unless you reach in and get hold of that home, and change its conditions, you are nullifying the uplift of the school. We are reaching for the home."

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